



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:

Phil Steele, or Phil.Steele@noaa.gov
727/824-5305, FAX 727/824-5308
<http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

May 17, 2005
NR05-023

COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION SUBMITS PETITION FOR EMERGENCY REGULATIONS OR INTERIM MEASURES TO ADDRESS OVERFISHING OF RED SNAPPER IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announces receipt of a petition for rulemaking under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Administrative Procedures Act. The Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) has petitioned the U.S. Department of Commerce to promulgate emergency regulations or interim measures to address overfishing of red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico primarily by further reducing bycatch of juvenile red snapper in the Gulf shrimp fishery.

The petition filed by CCA states the red snapper stock in the Gulf of Mexico is overfished and undergoing overfishing. The petition acknowledges the directed red snapper commercial and recreational sectors share responsibility for rebuilding the stock. However, the petition asserts that failure of bycatch reduction devices (BRDs), required in the Gulf shrimp fishery, to meet established bycatch reduction standards ensures years of continued overfishing of red snapper making recovery of this fishery unlikely. The petition seeks emergency regulations or interim measures primarily to stop the overfishing resulting from bycatch of juvenile red snapper in the Gulf shrimp fishery.

The CCA petition states the prevention of overfishing and recovery of the red snapper stock is predicated on at least a 44-percent reduction in bycatch of juvenile red snapper by the Gulf shrimp fishery. Further, because recent research indicates

current BRD use, in practice, yields only a 12-percent bycatch reduction, the existing plan for preventing overfishing and rebuilding the red snapper stock must be declared a failure. The petition seeks implementation of emergency regulations or interim measures that would result in bycatch reduction sufficient to allow the red snapper stock to rebuild within the time period established in the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources of the Gulf of Mexico.

The petition states that such measures should include strict bycatch quotas tracked by observer data, bag limits, total allowable catch restrictions, time and area closures or restrictions, improved BRDs, season limitations, seasonal closures, and other reduction measures. In addition, a firm target for bycatch reduction of between 60 percent and 80 percent of historic levels should be set, with a time line established that achieves this target within the shortest time possible. The petition also proposes a mandated effort reduction program for the Gulf shrimp fleet. The petition concludes the directed recreational and commercial red snapper sectors have already adopted many of the measures necessary to rebuild the stock.

NMFS is soliciting public comment on this petition. Comments received by 5 p.m. eastern time, July 11, 2005, will be considered by NMFS in determining whether to proceed with the development of regulations suggested by the petition. Upon determining whether to open the rulemaking

suggested by the petition, the Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA, will publish a notice of the agency's decision or action in the *Federal Register*.

You may submit comments on this petition for rulemaking, including its objectives, the need for such regulation, alternative approaches, and any other comments by any of the following methods:

- E-mail: RSPetition@noaa.gov. Include in the subject line the following document identifier: RSPetition.
- Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- Mail: Phil Steele, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701.
- Fax: 727-824-5308; Attention: Phil Steele.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to customers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing stewardship to our nation's coastal and marine resources. This and other news releases are available on the SERO homepage at <http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov>.

NMFS is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

FIRST CLASS MAIL
POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
PERMIT NO. G-19

National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Regional Office, F/SER
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use - \$ 300
NR05-023